

## Elkridge Patch

### Residents Fear Loss of Home Value with Proposed Rail Project

Investments in their homes could be in jeopardy, say those who live in greater Elkridge, and homeowners in another part of the country warn the fears are real.

By Elizabeth Janney | April 21, 2011

Residents of Patapsco Ridge, Hanover Crossing, Hanover Woods and Canbury Crossing say they fear their neighborhood will decline and their home values plummet if a proposed rail facility moves in. Those with experience in another part of the country warn that such concerns are well-founded.

"The minute this was announced, our home values are in the toilet," said Robyn Winder, who lives in Hanover Woods.

With the help of selling their homes, "some of us were going to retire soon," said neighbor Debbi Ault.

"We were going to springboard off the sale of this house and use the equity," chimed in a man who lives down the street.

Now they say their investments are in jeopardy because their neighborhood is being considered for a CSX freight transfer station to serve central Maryland. While the location at Hanover and Race Roads is one of four sites being evaluated, CSX officials said that it is the only site where the company has purchased land, leaving greater Elkridge residents alarmed.

"You will be a prisoner in your home. We are," said Sandra Hardy, who lives near an intermodal facility in Fairburn, GA. "We can't take a vacation because we are fearful of someone breaking into our homes. The environment here isn't what it used to be."

According to Hardy, having a freight station in her backyard attracts "lot lizards," or prostitutes, who loiter near trucks.

Called "intermodal" facilities because they allow for goods to travel between two modes of transportation—trucks and trains—the cargo transfer stations are positive, said Hardy, in that they take tractor-trailers off the road. But they can have negative effects on neighborhoods, she said.

"Utilizing rail reduces emissions and conserves fuel," said Bob Sullivan, spokesman for CSX. "A fully loaded double-stack intermodal train can carry the equivalent load of 280 trucks."

Initially, the proposed intermodal facility would serve 300 trucks a day, said Bradley Smith, project manager for Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), which has partnered with CSX in the intermodal project. The facility will have the capacity to accommodate 900 to 1,000 trucks per day, Smith noted.

To see whether other neighborhoods were impacted as hers had been, Hardy visited the intermodal facility in Charleston, SC. "Before that intermodal came about, there were doctors and lawyers that lived around there in that real nice community. Now it's nothing but a slum," she said. "And that's what they bring. That's what that kind of area breeds."

Hardy's neighborhood in Fairburn was an old industrial area that had been around since the Civil War. When CSX installed an intermodal facility in the late 1990s, there were more than a dozen houses in her neighborhood. Near the Elkridge/Hanover site, there are more than 300 homes. Elkridge, founded in 1733, is the oldest settlement in Howard County.

"There is no doubt in my mind that property values will drop," said Tom Duffey, who lives in Canbury Woods, near the proposed Hanover site. "I wouldn't buy a house in Elkridge now if I had to do it over. It seems like every day, the leadership of the state of Maryland moves us in a direction that is contrary to a good quality of life for the residents."

A local realtor agrees. Belinda Arnone, of Keller Williams, is selling a home across the street from the site of the proposed intermodal facility in the Patapsco Ridge neighborhood.

"To do this in this market...is outrageous," said Arnone. "It's absolutely shocking. My job is difficult enough in a good market." She added that taxes alone can cost buyers in that neighborhood nearly \$7,000.

The state has not said whether it would reevaluate residents' property taxes to offset any losses in their equity should a site near them be selected.

Jack Cahalan, spokesman for MDOT, said: "We simply can't speculate what potential mitigation measures may or may not be required at this early stage of the process."

In Hardy's area, all the homes were bought by CSX except hers and one other. She said CSX representatives told her to have her house appraised, then refused to pay the \$300,000 asking price.

"They would not even offer market value," she said. "Their proposals were such an insult that we said we weren't interested in selling at all."

Some of her former neighbors who had paid off their homes and gone into retirement moved, said Hardy, after CSX purchased their properties. But because they didn't receive much from CSX for their homes, she said they are paying mortgages again.

"They're going to promise them everything," said Hardy of CSX. "Oh yes, we're going to work with you."

At an April 20 public workshop with residents in Beltsville, another possibility for the central Maryland intermodal site, Sullivan told Patch: "You always want to have a process where you listen." He noted that in the last month, CSX opened a facility in Worcester, MA, that was well received. "We want to be good neighbors."

Hardy said: "And, they will meet with you. You will meet until you can't meet anymore. But they won't follow through. Contracts are made to be broken."

Residents have scheduled their own meeting with their elected officials in Elkridge on Thursday, April 21, to attempt to have their neighborhood removed from the list of potential sites. At the same time, another meeting—with CSX and MDOT—will take place in Hanover to provide information about the proposed facility.